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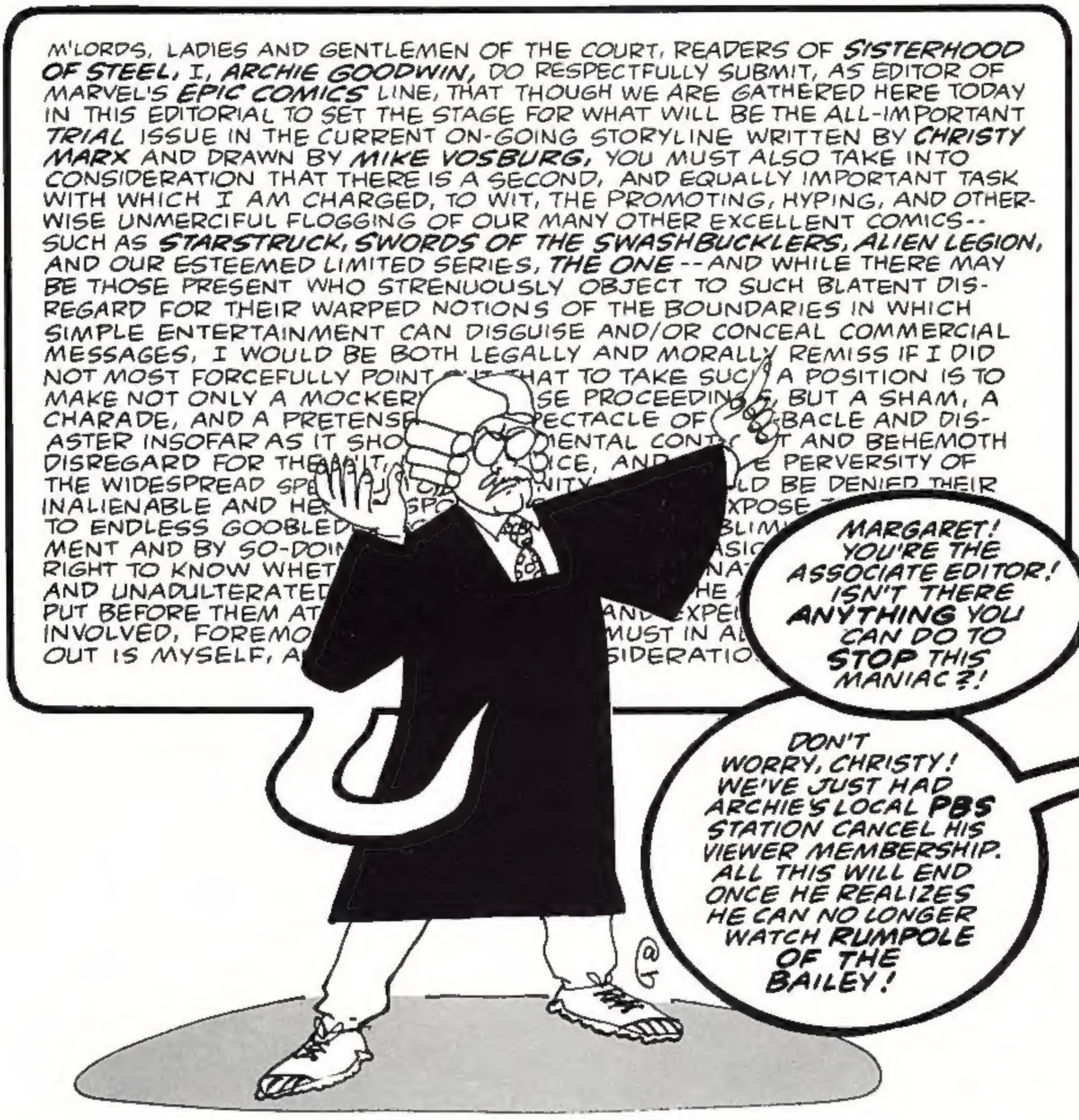

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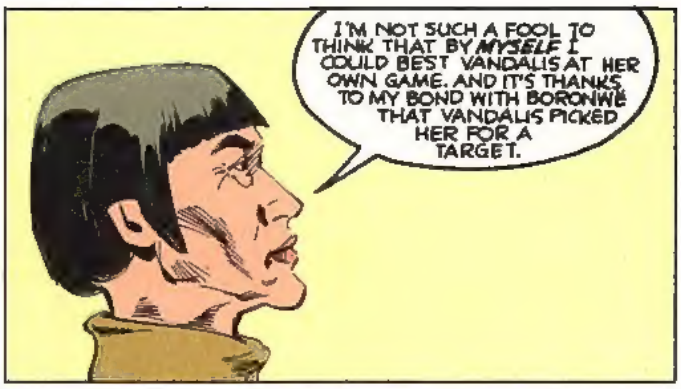
I BEG YOU, SILLENIS! YOU'RE THE ONLY WOMAN-OF-LAW WITHIN THE SISTERHOOD CAPABLE OF DEFENDING HER AGAINST VANDALIS!
YOU HAVE MADE UNSUBSTANTIATED CLAIMS BEFORE, LANNA. WHY AM I TO BELIEVE THIS ONE IS ANY DIFFERENT?

YOU KNOW THE PRINCESS! BORONWË IS ONLY A 17-YEAR OLD GIRL! WHAT CHANCE WILL SHE HAVE UNLESS SOMEONE WITH EXPERIENCE, KNOWLEDGE AND POSITION CAN SPEAK FOR HER?
THEN WHY DO YOU NOT SPEAK FOR HER *YOURSELF*? OBVIOUSLY, HER CAUSE IS DEAR TO YOU.


I'M NOT SUCH A FOOL TO THINK THAT BY *MYSELF* I COULD BEST VANDALIS AT HER OWN GAME. AND IT'S THANKS TO MY BOND WITH BORONWË THAT VANDALIS PICKED HER FOR A TARGET.

I ADMIT THAT BORONWË IS SPECIAL TO ME. I SEE GREAT PROMISE IN HER AND GAVE HER MORE ATTENTION THAN ANY OTHER STUDENT I'VE TRAINED. MY INTUITION IS SELDOM WRONG.

ISN'T IT BAD ENOUGH THAT VANDALIS RUINED *MY* CAREER? WILL YOU SIT BY AND WATCH HER *CRUCIFY* AN INNOCENT GIRL SIMPLY OUT OF HER HATRED FOR ME?

I WILL TALK TO HER. THAT MUCH I'LL DO, AND THEN... WE'LL SEE.
YES, M'LADY.
GLYNN, PREPARE MY BAG. WE'LL LEAVE NOW.

VOWS AND VENGENCES

"IT'S ONLY BEEN A LITTLE OVER A WEEK SINCE THEY BROUGHT ME BACK TO *ILDANA*. BUT IT SEEMS LIKE FOREVER."

"I THOUGHT THINGS WOULD GRIND ON, BUT I SHOULD'VE KNOWN BETTER. VANDALIS IS BACK AND SHE ISN'T WASTING ANY TIME. THE TRIAL BEGINS DAY AFTER TOMORROW."

"GOTTA HAND IT TO DINDRA, THOUGH. SHE'S DOING HER BEST TO CHEER ME UP."

SO THIS JERK WADDLES IN AND HE'S SO FAT HE CAN HARDLY FIT THROUGH THE FRIGGIN' DOOR.

HE'S GOT A FACE THAT WOULD MAKE A DOG PUKE, BREATH THAT WOULD KNOCK OVER A DONKEY, AND GREASY BLACK HAIR PARTED IN THE MIDDLE.
HALF HIS TEETH ARE GONE AND THE REST ARE AT HALF-MAST. HIS CLOTHES ARE SO FILTHY, THAT EVEN THE FLEAS WON'T NEST IN THEM. AND HE COMES UP TO ME, GIVES ME THIS BIG ROTTEN SMELLY SMILE AND SAYS...
HEY, BORONWE, ARE YOU WITH ME?
I'M LISTENING, DINDRA.
I'VE TOLD YOU THIS ONE BEFORE?
ONLY A COUPLE OF TIMES.
WE COULD PLAY ANOTHER GAME OF KNUCKLES 'N' BONES.
NO... THANKS. TWENTY TIMES A DAY IS MY LIMIT.

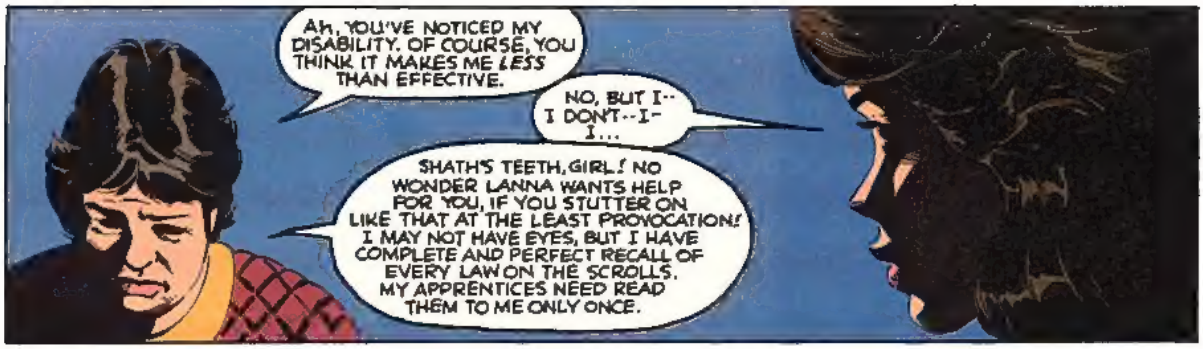
AW, C'MON, IT'S GONNA WORK OUT. SO MAYBE YOU'LL GET BUSTED IN RANK A LITTLE BIT--
I HAVE COME TO SPEAK WITH BORONWË. ARE YOU THERE, GIRL?
UH, YES, MY LADY!

I WILL SPEAK WITH YOU ALONE. GLYNN, SEE THAT WE ARE NOT DISTURBED.
YES, M'LADY.

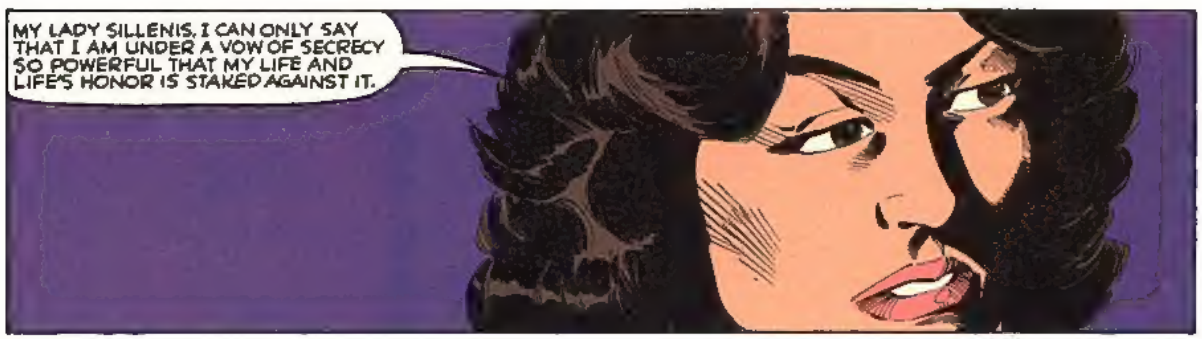
RUN ALONG, DINDRA. YOU WON'T BE SEEING BORONWË UNTIL THE TRIAL.
IF YOU SAY SO, CAPTAIN.
CHEEKY LITTLE SLUT.

DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?
NO, MY LADY. BUT I GUESS YOU ARE A WOMAN-OF-LAW.

CORRECT. I AM SILLENIS. LANNA THINKS A LOT OF YOU, GIRL. SHE'S ASKED ME TO REPRESENT YOU AT THE TRIAL. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT?
I'M HAPPY TO DO WHATEVER CAPTAIN LANNA THINKS IS--
BY THE GODDESS! SHE HAS NO EYES!


AH, YOU'VE NOTICED MY DISABILITY. OF COURSE, YOU THINK IT MAKES ME *LESS* THAN EFFECTIVE.
NO, BUT I-- I DON'T--I- I...
SHATH'S TEETH, GIRL! NO WONDER LANNA WANTS HELP FOR YOU, IF YOU STUTTER ON LIKE THAT AT THE LEAST PROVOCATION! I MAY NOT HAVE EYES, BUT I HAVE COMPLETE AND PERFECT RECALL OF EVERY LAW ON THE SCROLLS. MY APPRENTICES NEED READ THEM TO ME ONLY ONCE.

NOW, IF YOU HAVE NO FURTHER OBJECTIONS...
NO, MY LADY!
LANNA HAS BRIEFED ME ON THE BASIS OF THE TREASON CHARGES. BUT SHE INSISTS THERE IS SOME STRANGE STORY OF VANDALIS CHASING YOU INTO THE WOODS DURING THE RITUAL OF WOMANHOOD, POSSIBLY TRYING TO KILL YOU!
THIS WOULD CHANGE YOUR CASE CONSIDERABLY, IF HER CLAIM OF *UNJUST PERSECUTION* AGAINST YOU COULD BE GIVEN THE WEIGHT OF *PROOF*. IS THERE ANY TRUTH IN THE STORY? HAS VANDALIS EVER PERSONALLY COME AFTER YOU?
WHAT CAN I SAY? THE PRIESTESS MADE ME DRINK BLOOD WITH THE DAUGHTERS OF DEATH AND TAKE A *VOW OF SILENCE* THAT I WOULD *NEVER* REVEAL WHAT HAPPENED THAT NIGHT!
HOW FAR CAN I GO? CAN I EVEN TELL SILLENIS ABOUT THE VOW? I HAVE TO TELL HER SOMETHING!


MY LADY SILLENIS, I CAN ONLY SAY THAT I AM UNDER A VOW OF SECRECY SO POWERFUL THAT MY LIFE AND LIFE'S HONOR IS STAKED AGAINST IT.

A VOW? WITH THE *PRINCESS?*
NO! I MEAN, NO, BUT I... CAN'T SAY ANYMORE.
THEN, MY GIRL, THERE ISN'T MUCH I CAN DO FOR YOU.
(sigh) I'LL SPEND THE DAY WITH YOU TOMORROW AND PLAN OUR DEFENSE. MEANWHILE, YOU'D BETTER FIND A WAY AROUND THIS VOW OF YOURS.

SILLENIS?
I'LL REPRESENT HER. THERE IS ONE THING, HOWEVER. SHE'S *WITHHOLDING* SOMETHING VITAL TO OUR CASE.
HAVE A LITTLE HEART-TO-HEART. CONVINCE HER TO BE *SENSIBLE*.

WHAT THE HELL'S WRONG WITH YOU?! SILLENIS IS THE *BEST* THERE IS! YOU'VE GOT TO TELL HER EVERYTHING!
ARE YOU GOING TO LIE DOWN *MEEKLY* AND LET VANDALIS *CRUSH* YOU?

YOU TAUGHT ME ABOUT DUTY, TEACHER. YOU SAID DUTY WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN LIFE. AND A VOW IS A KIND OF DUTY, ISN'T IT?
WELL... YES, DEPENDING. DAMN IT, BORONWE, HOW IS IT YOU ALWAYS STOP ME DEAD WITH MY OWN TEACHINGS?

TEACHER... YOU SAID ONCE THAT YOU'D TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN YOU AND THE PRINCESS... WHEN THE TIME WAS RIGHT.
YES, YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW, ESPECIALLY NOW.

"IT WAS ELEVEN YEARS AGO. I WAS 3T AND A CAPTAIN FIRST CLASS.
VANDALIS WAS ONLY 21, BUT HAD HAD A BRILLIANT CAREER ALREADY. SHE WAS ALSO A FIRST CAPTAIN, EVEN AT THAT AGE, BUT I HAD THE GREATER SENIORITY, SO I WAS IN CHARGE.
IT WAS DURING ONE OF THE GREAT WARS WHEN THE BARBARIAN HORDES OF CHINGAR BLACK HAND SWEPT OVER THE BORDERS OF OALOANNI. THERE WAS A SQUAD OF US ASSIGNED TO SUPPLEMENT KING S'OTH'S PERSONAL BODYGUARD.
CHINGAR'S OVERWHELMING FORCE TOOK S'OTH'S CAPITOL. THE KING SACRIFICED ALL OF HIS OWN BODY-GUARD AND ALL BUT TWO OF MY COLUMNS TO COVER HIS OWN ESCAPE FROM THE CITY.
WITH ONLY 17 OF US LEFT, WE SET OUT TO TAKE HIM SAFELY THROUGH THE GIANT'S GORGE, A PASS IN THE MOUNTAINS, AND BRING HIM TO HIS SECOND FORTRESS WHERE HE WOULD MEET UP WITH HIS REMAINING ARMY.
S'OTH WAS A HANDSOME MAN WITH THE KIND OF ARROGANT MALE VIRILITY THAT VANDALIS FOUND EXCITING. AND HE TOOK TO HER IN KIND.

"EVEN THEN, VANDALIS CONTESTED MY EVERY MOVE, QUESTIONED EVERY ORDER I MADE."
IF THE KING WANTS HIS TENT--
I AM THE SENIOR OFFICER IN COMMAND! WE ALL HAVE GUARDS TO STAND TONIGHT AND WE'RE EXHAUSTED ENOUGH!
A MAN MUST HAVE HIS PRIVACY!
NEXT TIME YOU WANT A TENT, YOUR MAJESTY, YOU CAN PITCH IT BY YOURSELF!
"I DECIDED TO HAVE A PRIVATE TALK WITH VANDALIS DURING THE NIGHT. I HEADED FOR HER POSITION."
VAN! HOW DARE YOU SLEEP ON GUARD! WAKE UP, WOMAN!
PETRA?!
OH! WHAT! C-CAPTAIN LANNA!
WHAT THE HELL'RE YOU DOING HERE? WHERE'S VANDALIS?
SHE ORDERED ME TO TAKE HER WATCH.
SHE...SHE SAID THE KING WANTED TO CONFER WITH HER.
CONFER, MY ASS!
STAY ALERT, PETRA. I'LL HAVE YOU RELIEVED SHORTLY.

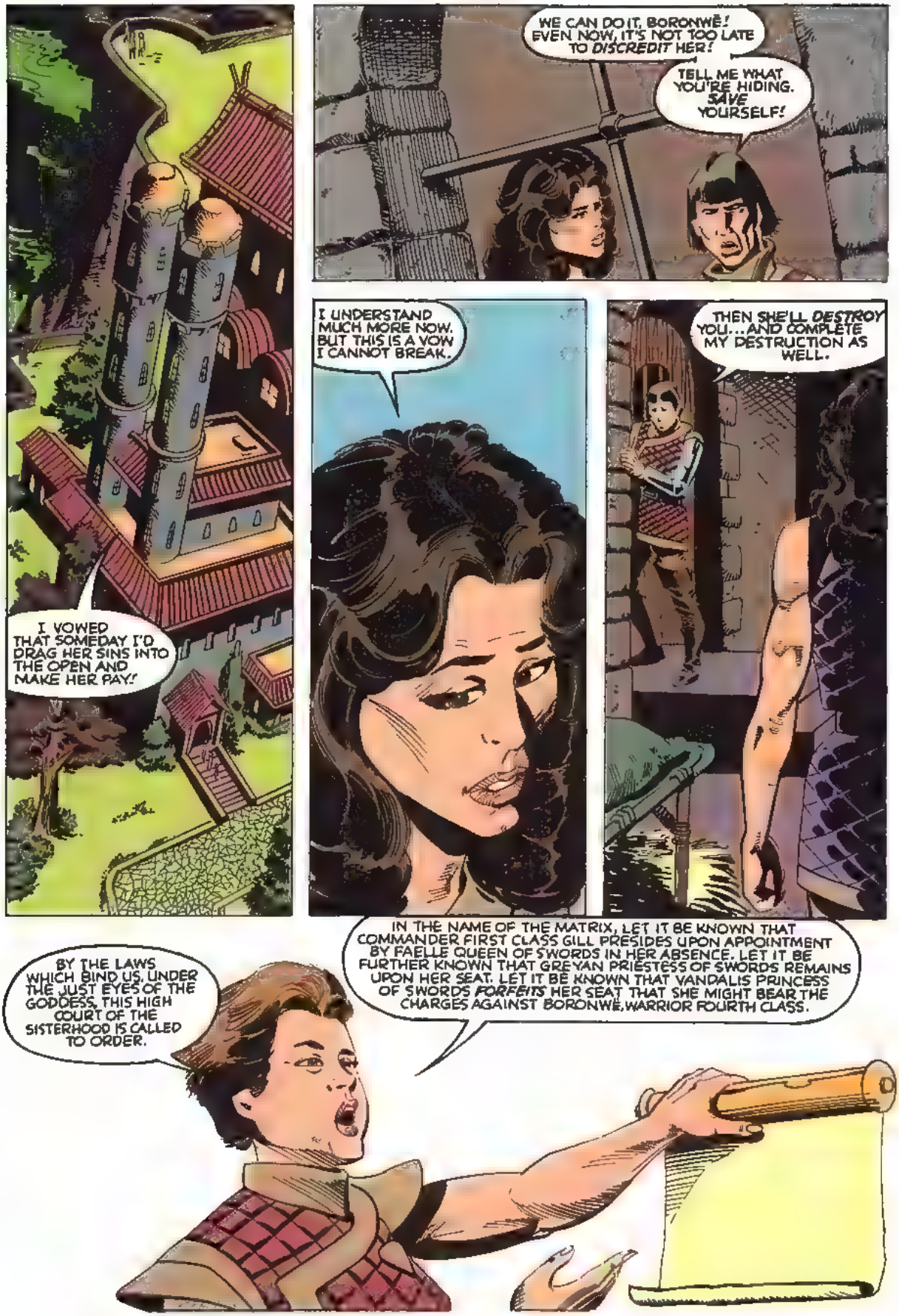
VANDALIS... ALWAYS TROUBLE...
...SO TIRED... GOTTA STAY... AWAKE...
YES! RIDE ME! RIDE ME!
HA-HA! MY BUCKING STEED!
BY EL'S RAM, THAT WAS GOOD! I SHOULD MAKE YOU MY QUEEN!
THERE'S ONLY ONE *QUEENSHIP* I DESIRE! AND SOMEDAY--
CAPTAIN VANDALIS!

YOU WILL RELIEVE SISTER PETRA AT ONCE!
HOW DARE YOU VIOLATE THE KING'S PRIVACY IN THIS MANNER!
GET THE HELL OUT, WOMAN!
SHUT UP! LISTEN!
YOU'RE ALL IN MY PAY, DON'T FORGET THAT!
THE BLACK HANDS! THEY'VE FOUND US!
"MY WOMEN WERE SO BRAVE THAT NIGHT! THEY RUSHED FORWARD TO THE DEFENSE!"

"SOTH AND VANDALIS WERE TANGLED IN THE SHEETS, EACH BLOCKING THE OTHER FROM REACHING THEIR WEAPONS."
EAAHHH!
MY FACE!
"I RAN TO PROTECT THE KING, BUT VANDALIS ROLLED IN MY WAY, SCREAMING ABOUT HER PRECIOUS FACE!"
YOU'VE RUINED MY FACE!
"I STUMBLED OVER HER, AND IN REGAINING MY BALANCE, MY GUARD WAS LEFT WIDE OPEN!"
GEEAHH GGGHH!

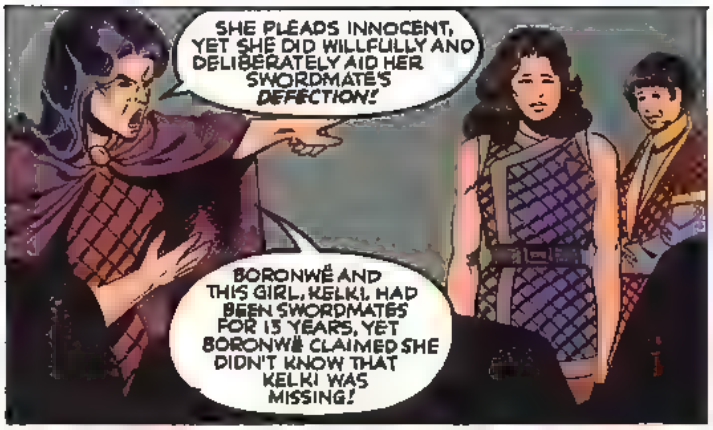
"GODDESS! I PRAY YOU NEVER SUFFER THE AGONY I SUFFERED THEN!"
"LATER I LEARNED THAT VANDALIS AND THE KING KILLED THE BARBARIAN, AND THE SISTERS DROVE AWAY THE PARTY THAT HAD FOUND US."
WE CAN'T AFFORD TO BE SLOWED DOWN! SHE'LL BE DEAD SOON--
SHRIVEL YOUR BLACK SOUL! SHE'S OUR CAPTAIN AND WE TAKE HER WITH US!
"THE RECORD STATES THAT VANDALIS PERFORMED BRILLIANTLY IN ELUDING THE BLACK HANDS AND FINDING HELP TO GUIDE THEM THROUGH SECRET PATHS OF THE GORGE."
"SHE ALSO PUT ON THE RECORD THAT MY GROANS OF PAIN NEARLY CAUSED THEIR DISCOVERY MORE THAN ONCE."
THEY'LL BE BACK WITH OTHERS!
PREPARE TO MOVE OUT! LIGHT GEAR ONLY!
"MONTHS LATER, I WAS WELL ENOUGH TO TAKE SHIP TO ILDANA."

"I, TOO, HAD MY DAY IN COURT AGAINST VANDALIS"
YOU CHARGE HER WITH DESERTION OF DUTY, YET YOU CANNOT PRODUCE LIVING WITNESSES.
IT IS *YOUR* WORD AGAINST *HERS*. HAVE YOU NO OTHER PROOFS?
HER ACTIONS HAVE LEFT ME A *CRIPPLE!* I *DEMAND* JUSTICE!
MY QUEEN, I *DO* HAVE A WITNESS! KING S'OTH!
THOUGH I *PITY* THIS UNFORTUNATE WOMAN, HER STORY IS *FALSE!* I REQUESTED A FEW WORDS WITH CAPTAIN VANDALIS, FOR IN TRUTH I HAD GRAVE *DOUBTS* OF CAPTAIN LANNA'S ABILITIES. ALL THE REST IS SPITEFUL FABRICATION!
"THEY *LIED.*"
"AND EACH WORD *CONDEMNED* ME AS A LIAR."
DO YOU SEE? VANDALIS WILL USE ANY LIE, ANY PERSON, ANYTHING SHE CAN TO GET WHAT SHE WANTS!

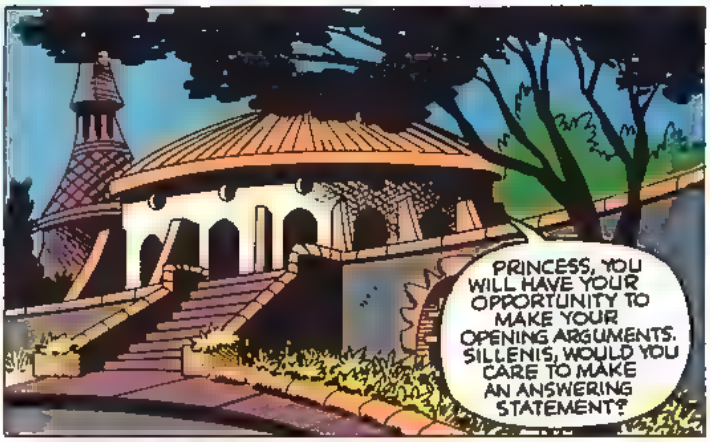

I VOWED THAT SOMEDAY I'D DRAG HER SINS INTO THE OPEN AND MAKE HER PAY!
WE CAN DO IT, BORONWË! EVEN NOW, IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO *DISCREDIT* HER!
TELL ME WHAT YOU'RE HIDING. *SAVE* YOURSELF!
I UNDERSTAND MUCH MORE NOW. BUT THIS IS A VOW I CANNOT BREAK.
THEN SHE'LL *DESTROY* YOU...AND COMPLETE MY DESTRUCTION AS WELL.
BY THE LAWS WHICH BIND US, UNDER THE JUST EYES OF THE GODDESS, THIS HIGH COURT OF THE SISTERHOOD IS CALLED TO ORDER.
IN THE NAME OF THE MATRIX, LET IT BE KNOWN THAT COMMANDER FIRST CLASS GILL PRESIDES UPON APPOINTMENT BY FAELLE QUEEN OF SWORDS IN HER ABSENCE. LET IT BE FURTHER KNOWN THAT GREYAN PRIESTESS OF SWORDS REMAINS UPON HER SEAT. LET IT BE KNOWN THAT VANDALIS PRINCESS OF SWORDS *FORFEITS* HER SEAT THAT SHE MIGHT BEAR THE CHARGES AGAINST BORONWË, WARRIOR FOURTH CLASS.

HOUSE OF GOLD, YOU HAVE BEEN SO INSTRUCTED. ARE THERE ANY OBJECTIONS?
WE HAVE NONE
HOUSE OF SILVER. YOU HAVE BEEN SO INSTRUCTED. ARE THERE ANY OBJECTIONS?
NO OBJECTIONS.
BRING FORTH THE ACCUSED.
DO I *PROFANE* THIS COURT WITH MY PRESENCE ON THIS SEAT? HOW CAN I DENY TO MYSELF MY *INVOLVEMENT* IN THIS GIRL'S CASE? AND I SHOULD BE AT FAELLE'S SIDE. SHE *NEEDS* MY CARE AND THE SISTERHOOD NEEDS HER TO NAME A SUCCESSOR! BUT TO WAIT WOULD ONLY ALLOW VANDALIS TIME TO SWAY MORE SISTERS TO HER SIDE! GODDESS, GRANT ME *WISDOM*, NOW IN MY HOUR OF UNCERTAINTY!
BORONWË, YOU ARE CHARGED WITH *HIGH TREASON*. HOW DO YOU PLEAD?

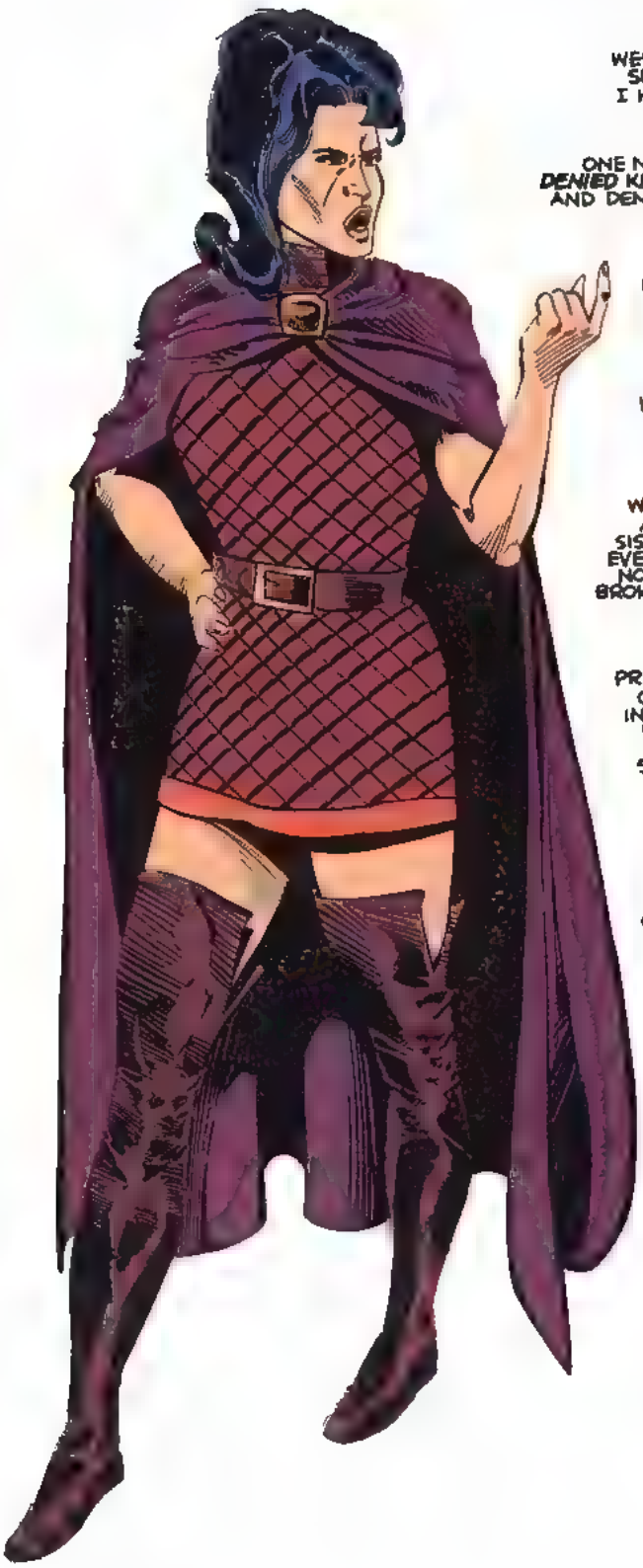
I PLEAD *INNOCENT* OF TREASON AGAINST THE SISTERHOOD.


SHE PLEADS INNOCENT, YET SHE DID WILLFULLY AND DELIBERATELY AID HER SWORDMATE'S *DEFECTION!*
BORONWË AND THIS GIRL, KELKI, HAD BEEN SWORDMATES FOR 15 YEARS, YET BORONWË CLAIMED SHE DIDN'T KNOW THAT KELKI WAS MISSING!

AND WHEN A PARTY CAUGHT UP WITH THE GIRL, BORONWË HELPED KELKI ESCAPE A *SECOND* TIME, WITH THE HELP OF A MAN!


PRINCESS, YOU WILL HAVE YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE YOUR OPENING ARGUMENTS. SILLENIS, WOULD YOU CARE TO MAKE AN ANSWERING STATEMENT?

THANK YOU, COMMANDER GILL. I HOPE TO SHOW THAT THE EVENTS ARE NOT AS SIMPLE AS THE PRINCESS WOULD HAVE US BELIEVE. THAT IS ALL I WISH TO SAY AT THIS TIME.



THE EVENTS ARE SIMPLE ENOUGH, BUT IT IS THE ***DANGER*** UNDERLYING THE DEEDS THAT MUST BE RECOGNIZED.

THE FACTS ARE THIS: BORONWË AND KELKI WERE OBSERVED BY A NIGHT GUARD MAKING SECRET NIGHT VISITS TO THE TEETH OF SHATH. I HAD THE GUARD WATCH, RATHER THAN INTERFERE, AND REPORT TO ME.

ONE NIGHT, KELKI DID NOT RETURN. BORONWË ***DENIED*** KNOWING THAT HER SWORDMATE WAS MISSING AND DENIED KNOWLEDGE OF HER WHEREABOUTS.

AFTER THE RECENT BATTLE AT WRIGHTWODE, IT WAS LEARNED THAT KELKI WAS NEARBY IN HIDING AND A PARTY WAS LED TO THE SPOT THERE. COMMANDER GLESPA ALLOWED BORONWË THE CHANCE TO ***REDEEM*** HERSELF BY BRINGING THE GIRL IN ALONE.

INSTEAD, BORONWË FAKED A SWORD FIGHT WITH THE MAN ACCOMPANYING KELKI AND ***DISOBEYED*** DIRECT ORDERS, THEREBY ALLOWING BOTH KELKI AND THE MAN TO ESCAPE.

WHAT ELSE CAN THIS BE BUT ***TREASON!*** IT IS A SYMPTOM OF A GROWING THREAT TO THE SISTERHOOD--***WEAKNESS!*** NOW, MORE THAN EVER, WE MUST BE STRONG AND UNITED! WE DO NOT HAVE A SINGLE TREATY THAT WOULD NOT BE BROKEN IF OUR SO-CALLED ALLIES THOUGHT WE HAD GROWN WEAK!

AND WHAT OF THE EVENTS IN ORANGE? PRINCE O'MAH OPENLY DEFENDS THE ***SLAVERS*** OF GLAQUR AND GRANTS THEM A FOOTHOLD IN ONE OF OUR MOST VALUABLE OUTPOSTS! WHY WOULD HE DARE MAKE SUCH A MOVE UNLESS HE SEES THAT THE SISTERHOOD'S STEEL IS ***TARNISHED*** WITH WEAKNESS FROM ***WITHIN?***

SISTERS, THERE IS TRULY MORE THAN THIS ONE GIRL'S TREASON TO BE RECKONED WITH HERE. IF WE SHOW AN ***UNDUE*** COMPASSION FOR THESE CRIMES, OUR ENEMIES WILL TEAR US DOWN! OUR ALLIES WILL GROW ***CONTEMPTUOUS*** OF US AND ***BREAK*** THEIR TREATIES EVEN AS ORANGE IS NOW BREAKING FROM US! AND WE WILL BRING OUR DESTRUCTION UPON OURSELVES!

SPLENDID, VANDALIS! A MOST DRAMATIC AND HEARTFELT *PERFORMANCE*. BUT LET US EXAMINE THINGS MORE CLEARLY, IN THE LIGHT OF REASON, NOT RHETORIC. IT IS ALL VERY WELL AND GOOD TO ATTEMPT TO *STAMPEDE* YOUR SISTERS WITH WORDS OF WEAKNESS AND FEAR, AND THEREBY *CLOUD* THE TRUE ISSUES. YET, THE SISTERHOOD HAS WITHSTOOD *GENERATIONS* OF THREAT WITHOUT CRUMBLING.

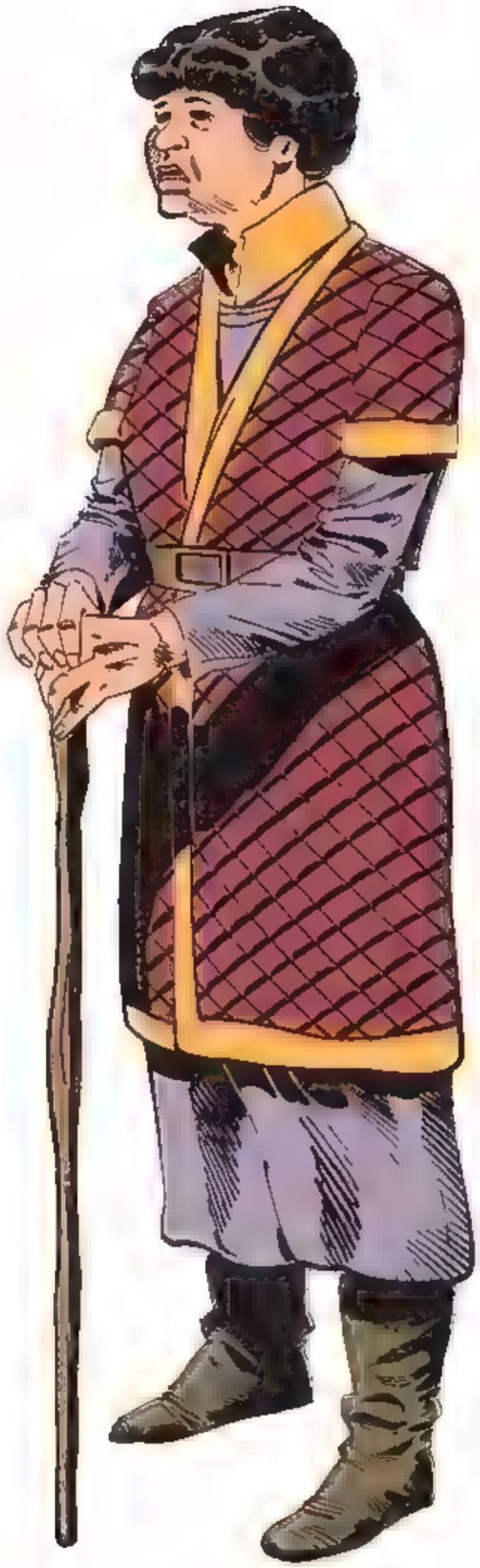
IT IS *NOT* THE FATE OF THE SISTERHOOD THAT IS ON TRIAL HERE... IT IS THE LIFE OF A SISTER: WE ARE HERE TO PASS JUDGMENT UPON ONE BORONWË, WARRIOR FOURTH-CLASS, AND NOTHING MORE. AND A WARRIOR, I MIGHT ADD, WHO WAS PROMOTED FROM CADET BECAUSE OF HER BRAVERY IN BATTLE.

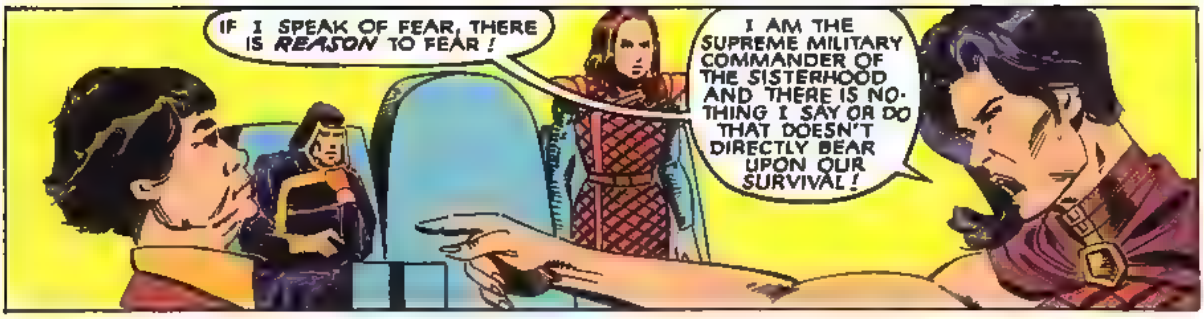
LET US EXAMINE, VANDALIS, YOUR INTEREST IN BORONWË. YOU HAD THE NIGHT GUARD WATCH, BUT NOT INTERFERE? FOR WHAT REASON? YES, IT IS A VIOLATION OF REGULATIONS TO SNEAK DOWN TO THE TEETH FOR MIDNIGHT SWIM, SO WHY DID YOU NOT TREAT IT AS THE MINOR VIOLATION IT WAS AND IMPOSE YOUR MUCH-VAUNTED DISCIPLINE *THEN*? SURELY, THE PRINCESS OF SWORDS HAD FAR MORE TO OCCUPY HER TIME THAN THE *PRANKS* OF A PAIR OF NOVICES.

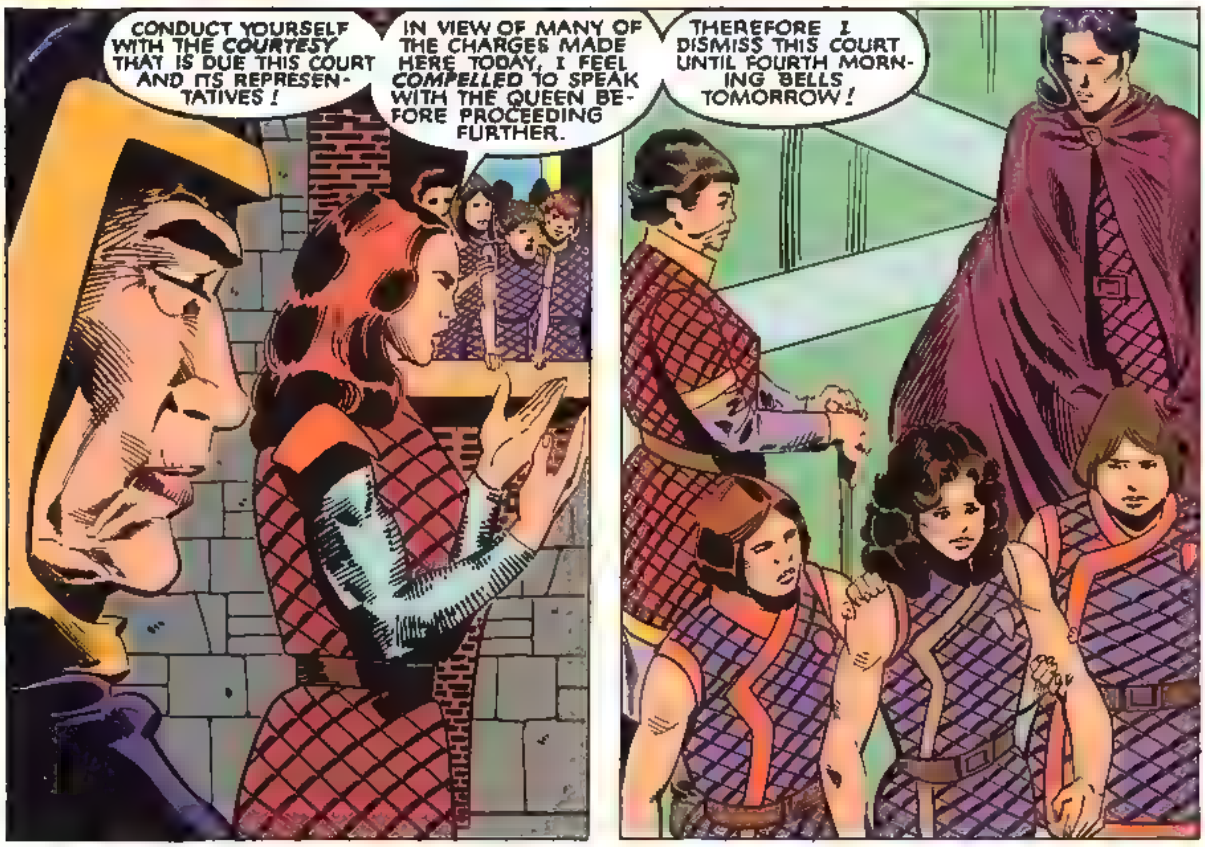
AS FOR ALLEGEDLY ALLOWING KELKI AND THIS MAN TO ESCAPE... THIS WE MUST EXAMINE IN MORE DETAIL WITH COMMANDER GLESPA. FOR HERE WE ARE DEALING WITH OPINION AND *SUBJECTIVE* OBSERVATION. CAN A MOMENT'S *HESITATION* TO FIRE UPON ONE'S DEAREST FRIEND TRULY BE CALLED TREASON AGAINST THE SISTERHOOD? AT WORST, WE MAY CONCLUDE THAT BORONWË IS GUILTY OF A YOUNG GIRL'S ERROR IN JUDGMENT.

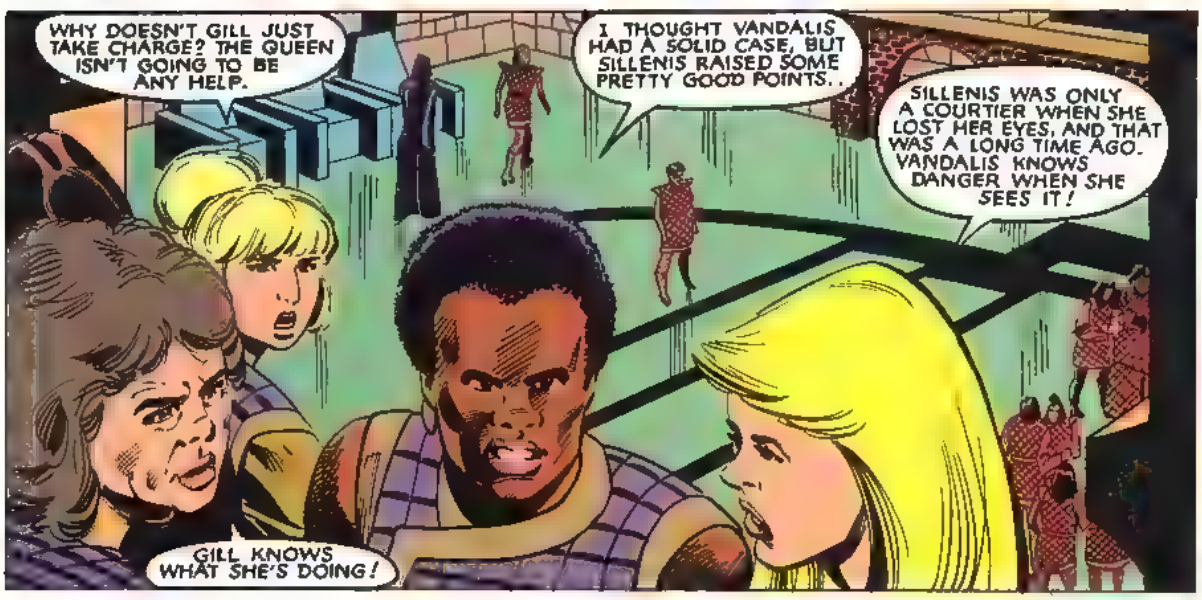
TO FORCE A TRIAL OF THIS SERIOUSNESS, TO CALL TO COURT THE MATRIX AND BOTH HOUSES FOR A CHARGE OF HIGH TREASON, IS *AUDACITY* BEYOND BELIEF! LISTENING TO YOU, VANDALIS, ONE GAINS THE IMPRESSION THAT WE ARE HERE SOLELY TO LISTEN TO YOUR POLITICS.

SISTERS, DO NOT BE MISLED. THIS IS A COURT OF LAW. WE ARE HERE TO PURSUE TRUTH AND METE OUT PROPER JUSTICE. WEIGH CAREFULLY ALL THAT YOU SEE AND HEAR, AND DO NOT BE MISLED BY FEAR MONGERS!

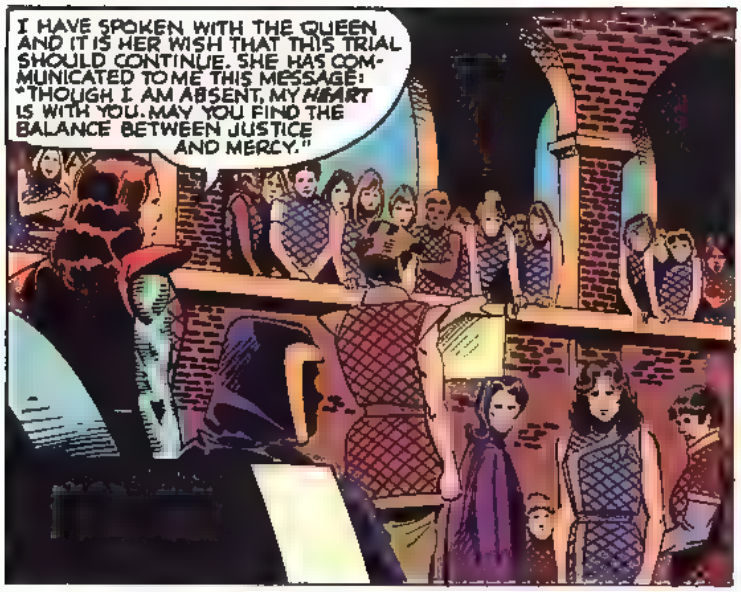


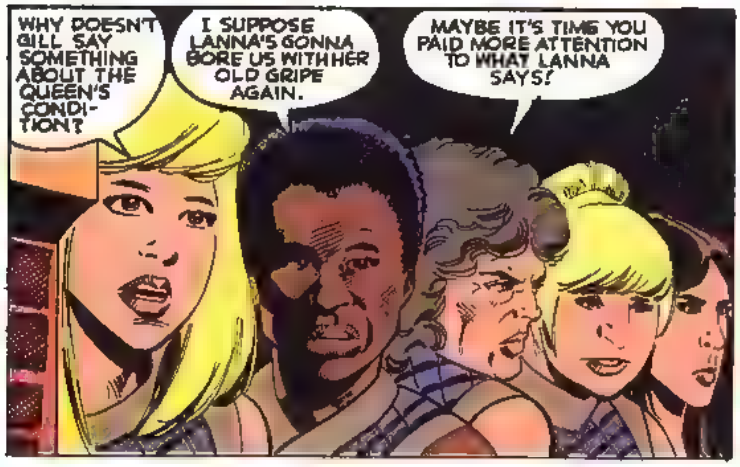

IF I SPEAK OF FEAR, THERE IS *REASON* TO FEAR!
I AM THE SUPREME MILITARY COMMANDER OF THE SISTERHOOD AND THERE IS NOTHING I SAY OR DO THAT DOESN'T DIRECTLY BEAR UPON OUR SURVIVAL!


CONDUCT YOURSELF WITH THE *COURTESY* THAT IS DUE THIS COURT AND ITS REPRESENTATIVES!
IN VIEW OF MANY OF THE CHARGES MADE HERE TODAY, I FEEL *COMPELLED* TO SPEAK WITH THE QUEEN BEFORE PROCEEDING FURTHER.
THEREFORE I DISMISS THIS COURT UNTIL FOURTH MORNING BELLS TOMORROW!

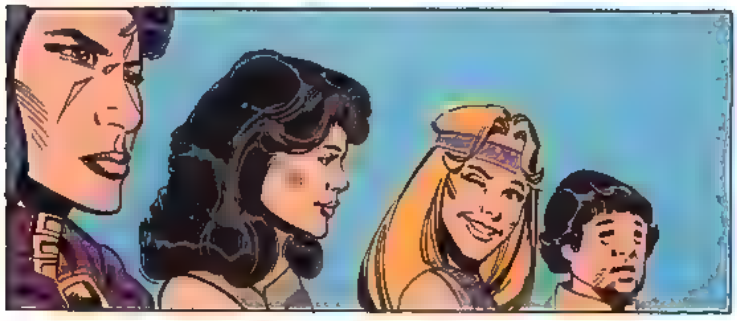

WHY DOESN'T GILL JUST TAKE CHARGE? THE QUEEN ISN'T GOING TO BE ANY HELP.
I THOUGHT VANDALIS HAD A SOLID CASE, BUT SILLENIS RAISED SOME PRETTY GOOD POINTS..
SILLENIS WAS ONLY A COURTIER WHEN SHE LOST HER EYES, AND THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO. VANDALIS KNOWS DANGER WHEN SHE SEES IT!
GILL KNOWS WHAT SHE'S DOING!

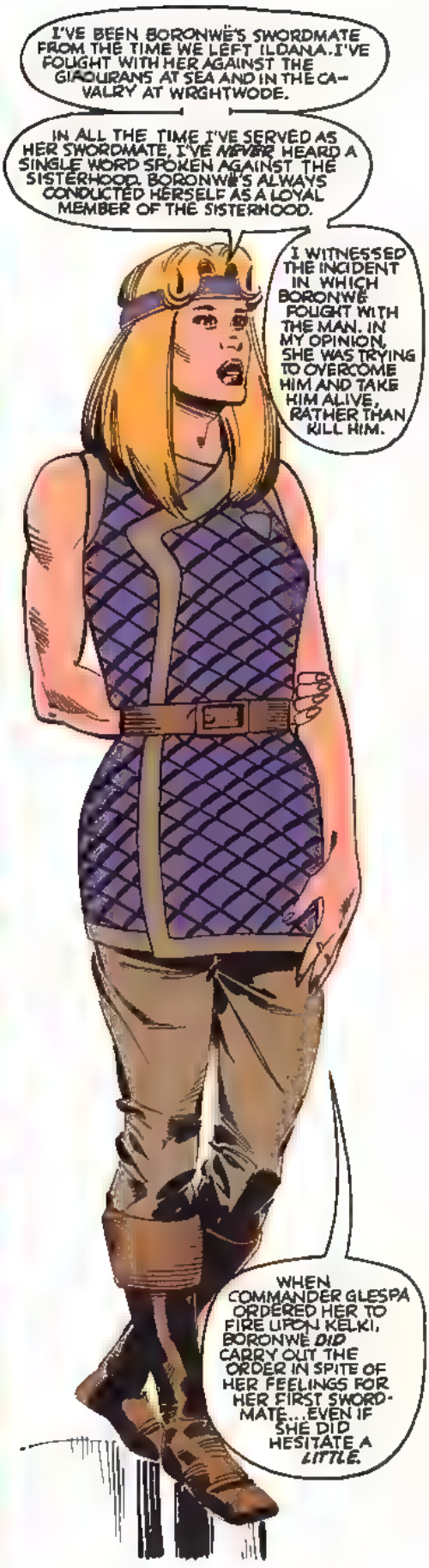
DO YOU KNOW WHAT TIME IT IS? WHAT DO YOU WANT?
I'VE GOT TO SPEAK TO SILLENIS ABOUT THE TRIAL. IT'S IMPORTANT!
M'LADY. .
I HEARD. LET HER IN.
I'LL SPEAK TO HER ALONE, GLYNN.
COME CLOSER. UNLESS MY EARS BETRAY ME, I KNOW YOUR VOICE.
AH, THE FACE MATCHES! WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU, GLESPA?


I HAVE SPOKEN WITH THE QUEEN AND IT IS HER WISH THAT THIS TRIAL SHOULD CONTINUE. SHE HAS COMMUNICATED TO ME THIS MESSAGE: "THOUGH I AM ABSENT, MY *HEART* IS WITH YOU. MAY YOU FIND THE BALANCE BETWEEN JUSTICE AND MERCY."


WHY DOESN'T GILL SAY SOMETHING ABOUT THE QUEEN'S CONDITION?
I SUPPOSE LANNA'S GONNA BORE US WITH HER OLD GRIPE AGAIN.
MAYBE IT'S TIME YOU PAID MORE ATTENTION TO WHAT LANNA SAYS!

I CALL FORTH DINDRA, WARRIOR FOURTH CLASS.




I'VE BEEN BORONWË'S SWORDMATE FROM THE TIME WE LEFT ILDANA. I'VE FOUGHT WITH HER AGAINST THE GIAOURANS AT SEA AND IN THE CAVALRY AT WRGHTWODE.
IN ALL THE TIME I'VE SERVED AS HER SWORDMATE, I'VE *NEVER* HEARD A SINGLE WORD SPOKEN AGAINST THE SISTERHOOD. BORONWË'S ALWAYS CONDUCTED HERSELF AS A LOYAL MEMBER OF THE SISTERHOOD.
I WITNESSED THE INCIDENT IN WHICH BORONWË FOUGHT WITH THE MAN. IN MY OPINION, SHE WAS TRYING TO OVERCOME HIM AND TAKE HIM ALIVE, RATHER THAN KILL HIM.
WHEN COMMANDER GLESPA ORDERED HER TO FIRE UPON KELKI, BORONWË *DID* CARRY OUT THE ORDER IN SPITE OF HER FEELINGS FOR HER FIRST SWORDMATE...EVEN IF SHE DID HESITATE A *LITTLE*.

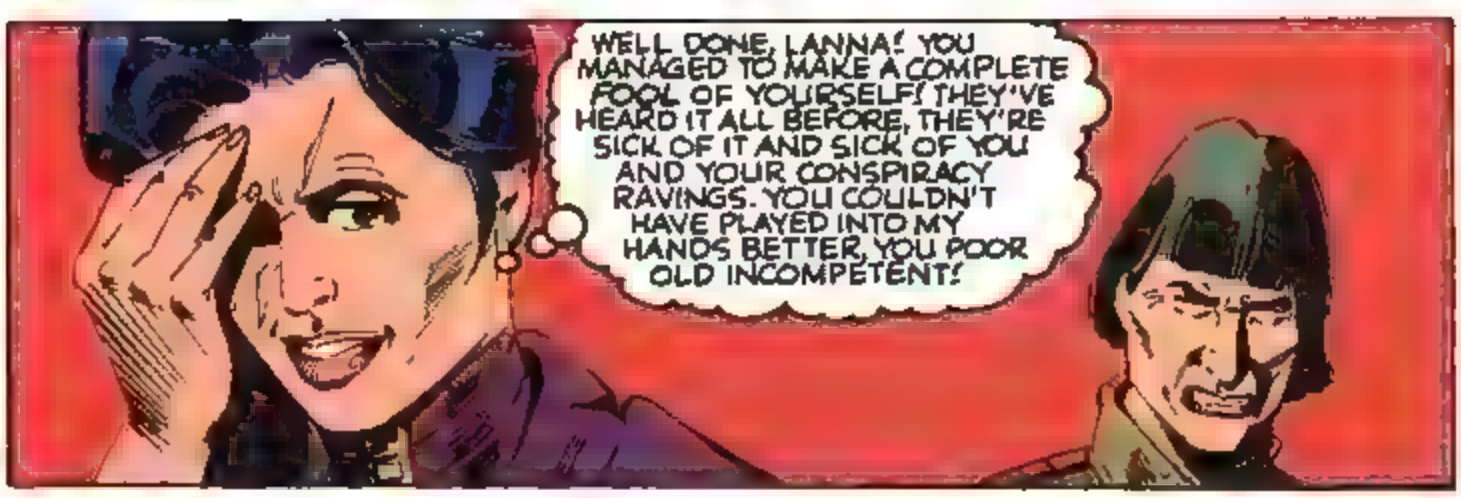
I REQUESTED PERMISSION TO SPEAK ON SISTER BORONWË'S BEHALF BECAUSE I'M TO BLAME FOR MOST OF WHAT'S HAPPENED.

SHE'S BEEN ONE OF MY SPECIAL STUDENTS. SHE'S A *GOOD* GIRL-- SMART, BRAVE AND LOYAL. MAYBE IF I'D SEPARATED HER FROM KELKI, THIS WOULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED. BUT YOU ALL KNOW THAT STRONG BONDINGS ARE *ENCOURAGED* BETWEEN SWORDMATES. SO HOW CAN WE DAMN HER FOR DOING WHAT WE WANTED HER TO DO?

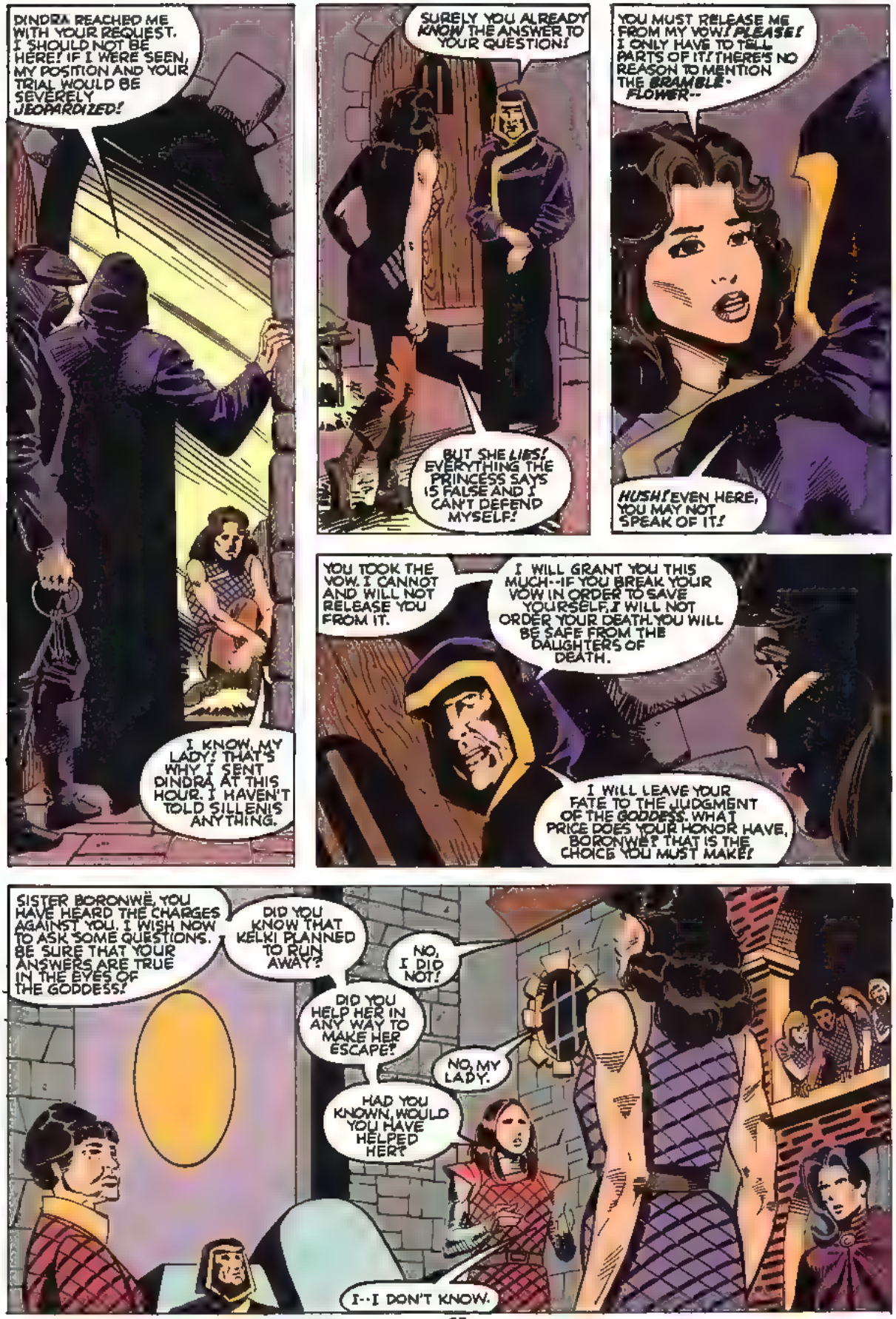
I WAS PRESENT WHEN VANDALIS INTERROGATED BORONWË ABOUT KELKI'S DISAPPEARANCE. THE PRINCESS MADE NO *PRETENSE* OF IMPARTIALITY. SHE'D *ALREADY* DECIDED BORONWË'S *GUILT* AND SHE TRIED TO KEEP ME FROM SPEAKING ON HER BEHALF THEN.

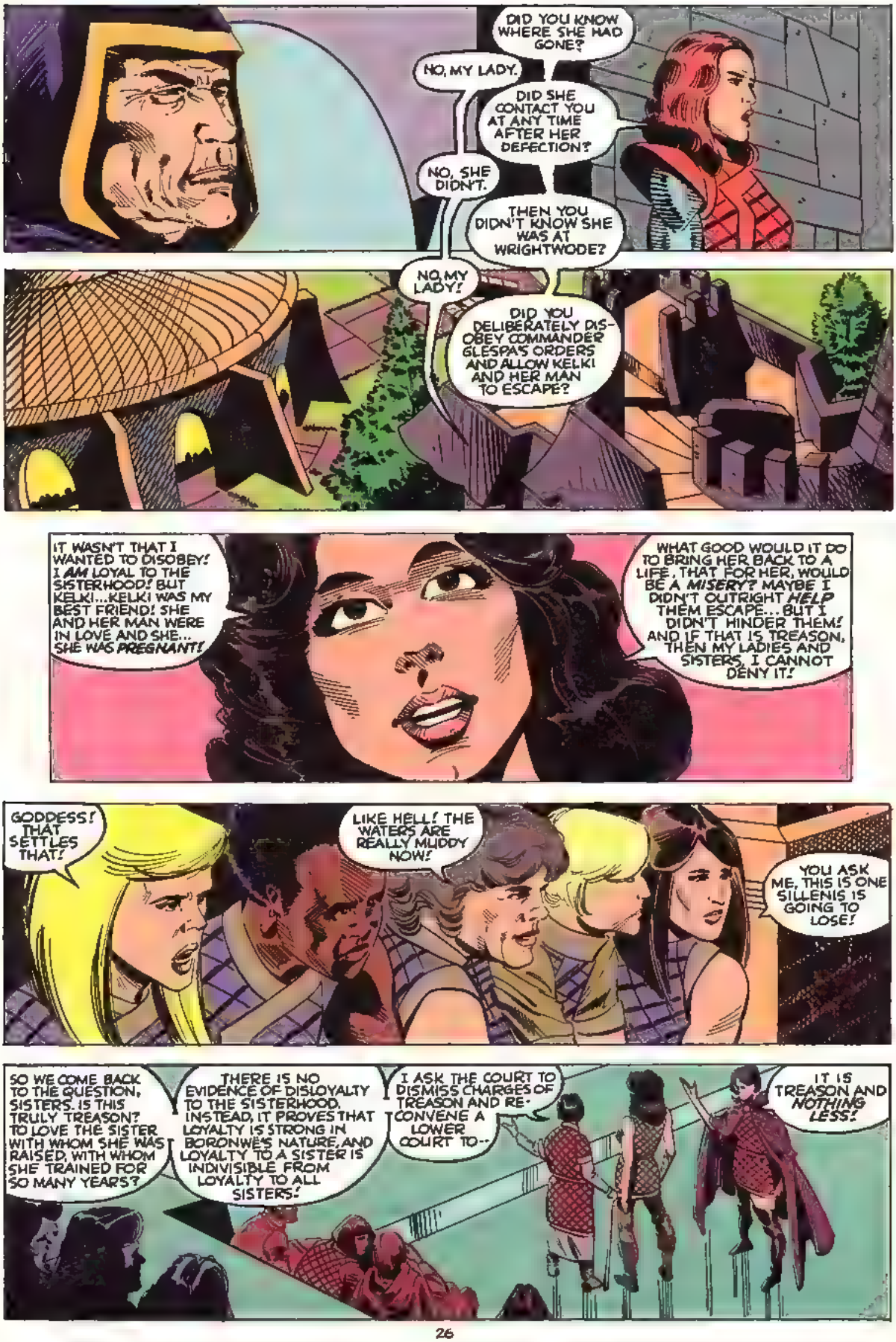
SISTERS, VANDALIS IS *USING* BORONWË AS A SCAPEGOAT. YOU ALL KNOW WHAT VANDALIS HAS DONE TO ME! YOU KNOW HOW MUCH SHE HATES ME! IF BORONWË HAD BEEN SOME OTHER TEACHER'S STUDENT, SHE WOULDN'T EVEN HAVE NOTICED SHE EXISTED! HER *CONSPIRACY* COULDN'T BE MORE OBVIOUS!

GO ON, VANDALIS! TELL THEM ABOUT THE NIGHT OF THE RITUAL! ADMIT YOU'VE *PERSECUTED* THE GIRL! TELL THEM!



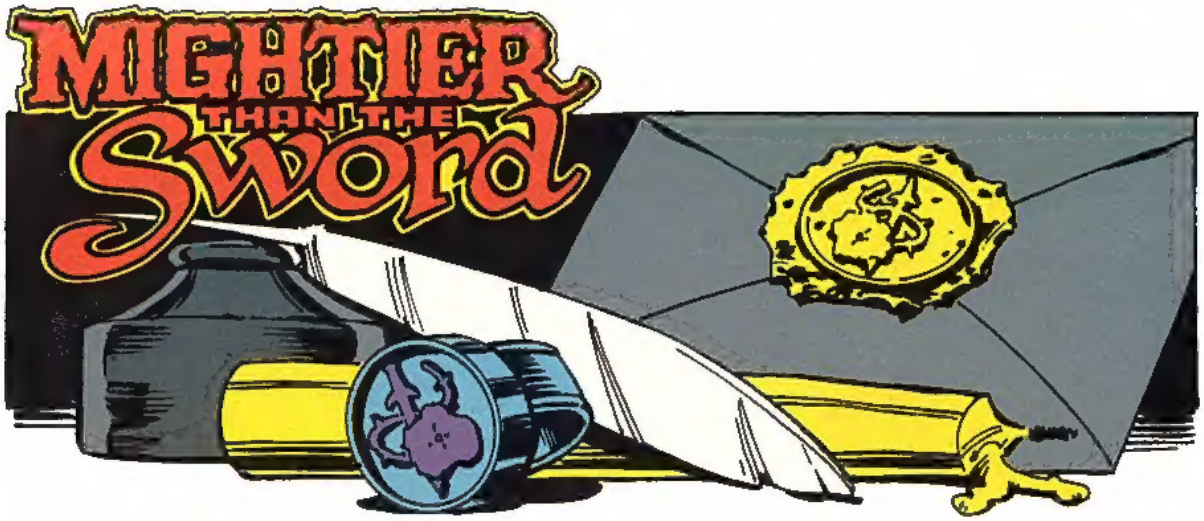
ON THE NIGHT OF THE RITUAL I ASKED BORONWË TO SHARE A CUP OF SISTERHOOD WITH ME. INSTEAD, PROBABLY THANKS TO LANNA'S ENDLESS BACK-STABBING, THE GIRL RAN AWAY.
OUT OF CONCERN, I WENT AFTER HER, INTO THE WOODS.
BORONWË ATTACKED ME WITH A KNIFE! FORTUNATELY, SHE WAS NO MATCH FOR ME. I LET IT GO, OUT OF RESPECT FOR THE SANCTITY OF THE RITUAL.
AT THE TIME, I THOUGHT THE GIRL SIMPLY MISGUIDED BY LANNA. NOW I KNOW OTHERWISE!
ARE YOU JUST GOING TO SIT THERE AND LET HER LIE, PRIESTESS?
GUESS YOU ARE.
COMMANDER GILL, IN LIGHT OF THIS NEW REVELATION, I REQUEST THAT THE COURT BE DISMISSED UNTIL TOMORROW, SO I MAY CONFER FURTHER WITH MY CLIENT.
I PROTEST! WHY WASTE TIME? LET THE GIRL SPEAK FOR HERSELF! IT'S TIME WE HEARD BY WHAT MEANS SHE WILL EXCUSE HER TREASON!
THOUGH WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED LITTLE TODAY, I FEEL IT BEST TO GRANT SILLENIS' REQUEST. THE COURT WILL MEET AT THE SAME HOUR TOMORROW MORNING. DISMISSED!
WHY DON'T THEY JUST GET THE GIRL AND GLESPA UP THERE AND GET IT OVER WITH?
I CAN'T BELIEVE VANDALIS WOULD'VE LET THE GIRL GO WITHOUT PUNISHMENT!
TOMORROW'S GOING TO BE VERY INTERESTING!


DINDRA REACHED ME WITH YOUR REQUEST. I SHOULD NOT BE HERE! IF I WERE SEEN, MY POSITION AND YOUR TRIAL WOULD BE SEVERELY JEOPARDIZED!
I KNOW, MY LADY! THAT'S WHY I SENT DINDRA AT THIS HOUR. I HAVEN'T TOLD SILLENIS ANYTHING.
SURELY YOU ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTION!
BUT SHE LIES! EVERYTHING THE PRINCESS SAYS IS FALSE AND I CAN'T DEFEND MYSELF!
YOU MUST RELEASE ME FROM MY VOW! PLEASE! I ONLY HAVE TO TELL PARTS OF IT! THERE'S NO REASON TO MENTION THE BRAMBLE-FLOWER--
HUSH! EVEN HERE, YOU MAY NOT SPEAK OF IT!
YOU TOOK THE VOW. I CANNOT AND WILL NOT RELEASE YOU FROM IT.
I WILL GRANT YOU THIS MUCH--IF YOU BREAK YOUR VOW IN ORDER TO SAVE YOURSELF, I WILL NOT ORDER YOUR DEATH. YOU WILL BE SAFE FROM THE DAUGHTERS OF DEATH.
I WILL LEAVE YOUR FATE TO THE JUDGMENT OF THE GODDESS. WHAT PRICE DOES YOUR HONOR HAVE, BORONWË? THAT IS THE CHOICE YOU MUST MAKE!
SISTER BORONWË, YOU HAVE HEARD THE CHARGES AGAINST YOU. I WISH NOW TO ASK SOME QUESTIONS. BE SURE THAT YOUR ANSWERS ARE TRUE IN THE EYES OF THE GODDESS!
DID YOU KNOW THAT KELKI PLANNED TO RUN AWAY?
NO, I DID NOT!
DID YOU HELP HER IN ANY WAY TO MAKE HER ESCAPE?
NO, MY LADY.
HAD YOU KNOWN, WOULD YOU HAVE HELPED HER?
I--I DON'T KNOW.


DID YOU KNOW WHERE SHE HAD GONE?
NO, MY LADY.
DID SHE CONTACT YOU AT ANY TIME AFTER HER DEFECTION?
NO, SHE DIDN'T.
THEN YOU DIDN'T KNOW SHE WAS AT WRIGHTWODE?
NO, MY LADY!
DID YOU DELIBERATELY DISOBEY COMMANDER GLESPA'S ORDERS AND ALLOW KELKI AND HER MAN TO ESCAPE?
IT WASN'T THAT I WANTED TO DISOBEY! I *AM* LOYAL TO THE SISTERHOOD! BUT KELKI...KELKI WAS MY BEST FRIEND! SHE AND HER MAN WERE IN LOVE AND SHE... SHE WAS *PREGNANT!*
WHAT GOOD WOULD IT DO TO BRING HER BACK TO A LIFE, THAT FOR HER, WOULD BE A *MISERY?* MAYBE I DIDN'T OUTRIGHT *HELP* THEM ESCAPE... BUT I DIDN'T HINDER THEM! AND IF THAT IS TREASON, THEN MY LADIES AND SISTERS, I CANNOT DENY IT!
GODDESS! THAT SETTLES THAT!
LIKE HELL! THE WATERS ARE REALLY MUDDY NOW!
YOU ASK ME, THIS IS ONE SILLENIS IS GOING TO LOSE!
SO WE COME BACK TO THE QUESTION, SISTERS. IS THIS TRULY TREASON? TO LOVE THE SISTER WITH WHOM SHE WAS RAISED, WITH WHOM SHE TRAINED FOR SO MANY YEARS?
THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF DISLOYALTY TO THE SISTERHOOD. INSTEAD, IT PROVES THAT LOYALTY IS STRONG IN BORONWE'S NATURE, AND LOYALTY TO A SISTER IS INDIVISIBLE FROM LOYALTY TO ALL SISTERS!
I ASK THE COURT TO DISMISS CHARGES OF TREASON AND RECONVENE A LOWER COURT TO--
IT IS TREASON AND *NOTHING LESS!*

SHE ADMITS HER GUILT! AND IF SHE HAS BEEN TAUGHT TO VALUE THE PERSONAL FREEDOM OF ONE GIRL OVER THE GOOD OF THE SISTERHOOD, WHO IS TO SAY HOW MANY OTHERS HAVE BEEN SEDITIOUSLY TRAINED? HOW WEAK WILL OUR DEFENSES BE IF WE LET THIS KIND OF BEHAVIOR RUN RAMPANT?
WE MUST NOT BEND! MAKE AN EXAMPLE OF BORONWË! LET THE WORLD KNOW THAT THE SISTERHOOD IS ONE MIND, ONE HEART AND ONE SWORD THAT STRIKES WITHOUT HESITATION! STRENGTH IS OUR ONLY SALVATION!
COLD WORDS, PRINCESS! BUT THERE IS ONE MORE INCIDENT TO BE ADDRESSED, ONE WHICH COULD CALL ALL YOUR WORDS INTO QUESTION!
BORONWË, DID YOU ATTACK VANDALIS ON THE NIGHT OF THE RITUAL? DOES SHE BEAR FALSE TESTIMONY AGAINST YOU?
I...CAN'T SPEAK OF WHAT HAPPENED ON THAT NIGHT. I CAN ONLY SAY THAT I'VE NEVER SOUGHT TO DO HARM TO THE SISTERHOOD...OR TO ANY SISTER.
DAMN YOU, GIRL!
ANSWER THE QUESTION, BORONWË!
THAT'S THE ONLY ANSWER I CAN GIVE, MY LADY!
THAT'S IT?
WHAT DOES SHE MEAN, SHE CAN'T?
WHO DOES SHE THINK SHE IS, REFUSING TO ANSWER A DIRECT QUESTION? IF I WERE GILL, I'D--
YEAH, WELL, YOU'RE NOT, SO SHUT UP!

PRIESTESS!
COMMANDER!
SHE'S DEAD! THE QUEEN IS DEAD!



Dear Christy,

I am afraid that this is not going to be very constructive, because I have no critique whatsoever to make. I liked everything about **SOS** from the start. The characters have depth. Their integrity is respected inasmuch as *everyone* can dish out as good as they receive. I especially liked the battle at Battling Balina's because it tells us a lot, both about the Giaourans and the Sisterhood. The Giaourans' "prank", attempted despite the current political situation, shows that they are a bunch of cruel, strong, bold, irresponsible, overgrown boys, and that this is fostered by their cultural set up. (King Andras did not punish his son and wished that at least the Sisterhood be defeated. This actually covert encouragement.) Elquin, who seems to have a more developed conscience, does not seem to be taken very seriously by his family. Since he's cuter, more sensitive and a bit less brawny than the others, I wouldn't be surprised if they tended to pick on him. (And people who are picked on find it easier to develop a more critical view on unjust situations.)

As to the Sisterhood, it confirmed them as very credible women characters. So many fighting women are the frail looking Red Sonja type, whereas yours have real muscles, needed in their line of work. They are not stereotypically goodlooking, and this is a plus. (Be it only for that, I am very fond of Commander Glespa. She seems all the more real for it, and I loved the way she handled the Giaouran thugs.) There are bound to be lesbians in such a women culture, and thank you for showing it. But all very realistic since it reminded me of the atmosphere of the dissension we had in our local feminist group.

This makes me also understand why you do not want the label "feminist". **SOS** is feminist by definition, since it shows that there are viable, satisfying alternatives to the traditional submissive role of women. That women can be self reliable, strong and competent and that education has a role in this. However, **SOS** does not fit into a feminist *doctrine* that determines what is politically correct to show and what is not. And that, I think, is what you meant. There are so many different feminist theories, that as long as you do show competent, self assured women, you are bound to find yourself in tune with some feminist views. But **SOS** has a life of its own, and is not the illustration of a given ideology, which would reduce the expression of the team's creativity.

For all these reasons, **SOS** is one of my favorite (If not *the* favorite.) comics, and I read quite a few.

I am a 24 year old student. Since English is a foreign language to me, I might make mistakes and use funny turns of expression. I am sorry and hope you will disregard them.

As to your question about the French comic book scene, it is difficult to answer because the French have the world neatly divided between the Bandes Dessinees (which are French or Belgian comic books), and American style Super-Heroes comic books. They think very highly of the first one (It is art.), and they don't think very much of the second (It is kid's stuff.). Me, I think that distinction is sometimes very arbitrary.

Catherine Anestopoulo
Paris, FRANCE

Andras favors Benignus and his ilk precisely because of their brutality. If not for his political tactics, only recently adopted, he would have given them his blessing to go bash some Sisters and probably joined in. Elquin is indeed a stranger amongst them, along with a few other of his brothers, not everyone is born of the same mold.

I heartily endorse your statements on the "feminist" aspects (or non-aspects) of the book, and believe me, your English is

much, much better than my French, (I love the liquid flow of the French language.) and your spelling is far better than most Americans.

The term "kid's stuff" has become one of my pet peeves. It is the single greatest stumbling block that a creator in the American comic scene faces when trying to do mature material. It is the perception held by 99% of all Americans and it drives me mental. On the other hand, there are very few American comics worthy of being considered Les Bandes Dessinees, and that's a shame, too.

Dear People,

With respect to **Issue #5**... where to start? I'm delighted and fascinated by the unfolding characters of Vandalis and "King" Andras especially. Their similarities and differences resonate through the entire background; a good way of comparing and contrasting their repective organizations.

The inclusion of Zeline was an added bonus; I was curious about her position and responsibilities when they were first mentioned in **Issue #1**, and hadn't counted on the Matron herself appearing in the story so soon. Well done.

Poor Vosse! Even without all this uproar—or rather, because of it—his "poor, timid" Kelki is not remaining so. Another interesting development.

In response to Mike Rosser's letter in **Issue #4** about modernisms, I remind him that this is another—I presume—timeline we're dealing with, not Middle Ages in Europe. In other words, fantasy, and a good consistent one, too.

I like the way you're handling the romance—such as it is—between Boronwë and Elquin; less star-crossed lovers than two mature, passionate people who, as Boronwë said in **Issue #4**, take, and are glad of the time they have.

That was a beautiful scene in **Issue #5** where Gill offers to bring in the Giaouran bodies as further evidence. I don't doubt that she had them on hand, either! I begin to see why Ambyre and she are as good negotiators as they are.

As a dedicated fantasy gamer, I greatly appreciate the detail, consistency and depth of character you people put into **SOS.** Please take it as a compliment when I say that this comic "reads" like a top-notch fantasy game campaign. In fact, the Sisterhood, by virtue of the detail you've put into it, could easily be transplanted into just about any game system. Indeed, I fully intend to; it is too good a thing to miss!

My sister and I have been enthralled since the first issue; keep it coming.

Chris Cooper
Santa Cruz, CA

*Yes, **The Sisterhood** is set in an "alternative" world which is not our Middle Ages at all. I don't want to invent a whole new fantasy language. I'm sure the Roman soldiers had some of "suck," and that's how it was intended, as an equivalent that we understand.*

I must credit Mike Vosburg with the suggestion of having Kelki take the sword for Neesa and fight again. It was a good touch.

Gill is a cunning negotiator, and she doesn't make idle threats or empty promises.

As for gaming, see next letter.

Dear Christy & Mike,

Thank you for producing such an interesting and complicated comic! I am a role-player, and this makes me all the more appreciative for a fantasy book that goes beyond the accepted norms of kill a monster, rescue a girl, defeat a wizard. Your book has given me something to present to my players as what a fantasy plot could and should entail.

I would like to see some more development of the religious aspect of the Sisterhood. It seems to me that they are the most (or close second) culturally advanced society upon the world you have created, and since most advanced societies have a structured religious base, it would seem logical that not only honor, but devoutness should play some role in their lives.

I would also like to congratulate you on the quality of artwork in **SOS.** It seems quite realistic, but for a society similar to the Old West, not the Iron Age. I take as an example the square wooden forts apparent in **Issue #5.** Therefore, you could rationalize some new research into weaponry coming up with gunpowder. This would give you an excellent advantage for the barbarians if they were behind the research! It could turn the comic into a tale of two overthrows!

Scott Wesely
Lincoln, NE

I'm pleased at the number of people who have written to mention using the Sisterhood in fantasy games. Feel free to write and give me more details on how this would work.

Some of the Sisters are quite devout; others have become cynical or even turned to other beliefs. It varies with each individual.

The Romans had wooden forts long before the Old West. Gunpowder is an innovation I don't wish to get into. It simply doesn't appeal to me, personally. I'm still debating whether or not to introduce crossbows.

Response to the Scrolls of the Sisterhood *had been wonderful. It isn't too late to subscribe and expand your Sisterhood reality. Send $9.00 for six issues to C. Marx; PO Box 1952; Wrightwood, CA 92397.*

*It all comes together in **Issue #8—"JUDGEMENT AND JUSTICE".** See you there.*

APPENDIX #6
COURTS AND LAW SYSTEM

There are many levels of justice and discipline within the Sisterhood.

The first and most basic is the discipline dealt to the children and Novices by their instructors and barracks-mistresses, and to a limited degree within the social structure of the girls themselves. Within each barracks, an older girl is appointed as "monitor" of her section, a position of responsibility that is considered an honor, though it does allow for a few bullies.

The punishments are up to the barracks-mistress or instructor and usually consist of unpleasant manual labor, like cleaning stables and chicken coops, scrubbing floors, hauling fireplace ashes, etc. For Novices, the manual labor more often means extra duty or hours of extra work-outs. And, of course, it all goes on her record and can count against her during the Week of Trials.

A girl who causes frequent and severe problems must face review boards consisting of instructors and trainers. If she fails to respond to discipline she could ultimately find herself facing the Princess of Swords who would review her case and determine what to do with her. If the Princess cannot cure her problem and the girl is found unfit for martial service, she will be transferred into the Matron's service. The Matron is then faced with the task of finding an appropriate use for the girl and dealing with the antagonism involved. The Matron has full authority to deal as she wishes with discipline within her House, as long as nothing gets out of control.

However, it is generally recognized that as long as a girl ultimately tows the line, her aggressiveness can be very useful when her energies are finally channeled into battle. Wildness and temper are tolerated a great deal more than disobedience of orders.

Once a girl becomes a full Cadet or Sister, however, she is open to more severe judgement. Cases of possible disobedience, cowardice and other breaches of conduct are handled by a single officer or a disciplinary review board of officers, depending upon the severity of the case.

Officers who have committed crimes must face a Court consisting of higher-ranking officers, appointed by the highest-ranking officer from those officers who are available at the time. In the vast majority of cases, these are handled in the field, at the nearest major outpost. Sisters and Officers do have recourse to appeals. A second Board or Court will then be appointed and the case reviewed. The decision of this second body will be final. On rare occasion, a Sister convicted of some crime may manage to get the attention of the Princess, Priestess or Queen with a petition. It is entirely up to the discretion of any

member of the Matrix to intervene or not, as she sees fit.

The most severe crimes, such as treason or murder, and charges brought against members of the House of Gold or Silver or against extremely high-ranking officers, are tried in the High Court on Ildana.

Depending upon the severity of the charges, a lower Court may be convened in which the Princess, or more rarely the Queen, sits in judgement, with a selected group of 10 Golds and 20 Silvers, who hear the case and vote upon innocence or guilt. The decision is reached by a majority vote.

The High Court consists of the Matrix and the entire body of the Golds and Silvers. Two members of the Matrix must sit in attendance, though a representative may take the place of one member in an emergency, as Gill has done taking the place of the Queen during her illness. This is not considered an ideal arrangement, and in fact could be challenged by Sillenis as a potentially non-valid Court.

Judgement is reached by a vote of all the Golds and Silvers, including the votes of the Matrix, and the majority decision rules.

Within the Sisterhood and the ranks of Sisters there are the women-of-law. They elect not to take seats with the Golds or Silvers, nor do they engage themselves as trainers. They study the laws upon the scrolls of Ildana and are available to act either in prosecution or in defense of Sisters who come before the courts of the Sisterhood. They are highly regarded for their knowledge and frequently consulted upon other points of law dealing with treaties and trade agreements.

There is one group which falls entirely outside this system of law—the Daughters of Death. They are the responsibility of the Priestess. If a Daughter is found treasonous, she dies at the hands of the Priestess or Daughters, quietly and efficiently.

A Sister who is convicted of a serious crime against the Sisterhood and has run away rather than face the Courts, is declared a traitor. She then becomes fair game to any Sister who finds her. But more terrifying yet, she knows that the Daughters of Death will be dispatched for her and a knife may lurk in any shadow, poison in any cup.

While convicted Sisters can be imprisoned, most are stripped of rank with heavy fines imposed upon them, and returned, with cautious overseeing, to the field. The most serious cases, such as treason, are open to the death penalty. The choice of punishment is up to the Queen, or her chosen representative.